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The Effects of Divorce on Children

Over one million children are involved in divorce situations across the United States every year (Bing, Nelson, and James 160). This statistic has only shown up in the past decade. Divorce became more common after the late 1960’s and early 1970’s when the no-fault divorce law was passed in many states around the country. This law started in California (Jolivet 175). Children have been at the forefront of research in post divorce situations. Even though there are a small amount of family cases where divorce cannot be avoided, a two parent single household is almost always needed to properly raise a child. If this type of family structure is not provided for the children they begin to obtain social and psychological effects, these differ in severity between boys and girls, along with social and psychological effects children tend to be more stressed towards the differing roles their parents must take on after a divorce.

Divorce historian Glenda Riley states that divorce in the United States can be dated back all the way to the beginnings of our country in the 1600’s (Riley 8), notes Glenda Riley in her book “Divorce: An American Tradition.” She also states that the first official court signed decree of divorce that is still documented is one that happened in 1639 in Massachusetts (Riley 3). Some statistics that Riley notes in her book are astonishing. From the middle of the 17th century the divorce rate has been on the increase and spreading around the world. By the 1880’s one out of every sixteen marriages ended in a divorce and one hundred years later about half of the marriage population was obtaining a divorce (Riley 5). With all of the romantic movies and books out there on the market the public would think there would be a desire to keep a marriage together, but just about everything in life has its positives and negatives. A study in 1989 came out about the large negative effect divorce had on the children in the situation, which astonished the public (Riley 7). Many more studies started coming out looking at the different effects more closely.

Divorce has many effects on children. Divorce has social, mental, emotional, and physical effects on children, which is discussed later in this essay. The nuclear family structure, two-parent (can be either mother-father, mother-mother, or father-father) single household is the family structure that is needed to bring a child up with the least amount of possibility of getting psychosocial and psychological problems. This structure brings the most stability to the family environment.

Social analyzer of children, Afifi says the social effect divorce has on children is psychosocial. Children need their parents to talk to them about the situation and what is going on between each parent and their relationship so they can grow socially with the situation and understand what to say outside of the family (Afifi, Afifi, and Coho 519). All too often the parents in this situation take this advice in the wrong direction and start talking negatively about the other parent around the child or children in the situation. This effects children because they feel that it is fine to publicly talk negatively about one of their parents. Most children do not realize what they are actually doing but they are pushing one of their parents away (Afifi, Afifi, and Coho 519). The effects that are apart of most of these children’s’ lives are becoming anti-social, not obeying authority, and being involved in juvenile delinquent activities (Portnoy 128). Academic problems are more prevalent in children who are from divorced families than children from nuclear two parent families (Portnoy 128). Not only do children who come from divorced family background have problems with authority figures but they also have problems relating to their peers which means they have trouble making friends their own age and finding true relationships that they can trust (Bing, Nelson, and Wesolowski 161). The social effects that divorce has on children are insurmountable and those are just a few of the problems. The mental effects are also astonishing. These include many psychological disorders that can be induced by high stress environments like divorce and splitting parents and family members being apart. Agitation, self-blame, and feelings of guilt are just a few mental effects children obtain when their parents split apart (Jolivet 176). An interesting point is that boys are quicker to be effected by divorce than girls. The boys in the study were also more dramatic and acted out in defiant behavior more quickly than the girls, but overtime girls would show the effects by skipping school more often and running away from home (Jolivet 177). In social situations children with a divorced family reportedly feel more anxiety when talking about their parents in public social situations (Afifi, Afifi, and Coho 522). Along with anxiety children in this situation also face a high risk of depression and self-esteem problems (Portnoy 127).

Standards of living are different between each parent after divorce, which causes the children in the situation to have psychological distress (Portnoy 127). Nicole Bing, is a behavioral and disorder studies worker for a children’s hospital and says, some different standards of living that change in a divorce are the income of the home is decreased because there is only one income instead of two coming into the home. Also relocation of the family can cause issues for the children like; making new friends, getting use to new territory in a short amount of time, and leaving old friends (Bing, Nelson, and Wesolowski 160). A major issue that children begin to have is blaming themselves for their parents’ divorce. This brings up problems because their self-esteem and pride are lowered and they believe they cannot be trusted anymore, which will hurt their future relationships (Portnoy 128).

Each parent plays a crucial role in the growth and development of a child (Neale and Flowerdew 31). The father-child relationship is vital to both persons. Psychologically speaking, fathers are more attached to their children more than any other possession (Kruk 160). When the parents split the court usually rules in favor of the mother for child custody and this hurts both the child and the father (Kruk 160). The child usually does not get to see the father much after the divorce and they miss out on the growth and attachment to their father who helps the child mentally be able to trust someone with a relationship (Kruk 160). Social and mental factors and effects hurt the child both in present and future relationships and social interactions (Neale and Flowerdew 28).

The mother’s role is more nurturing and providing basic needs for the child. Depending on the age and developmental stage the child is in is when it matter which parent is needed more for the child. As an infant the child is in need of its mother to provide food but as it grows older it is less dependent on its mother for food and looks more to its father for social standards (Kruk 160). Throughout the developmental process both the mother and father are needed to shape the child’s personality and moral background. This family structure can also be changed with a two mother parental structure, where both moms would be sharing the roles of father and mother while tending to the child’s needs developmentally. The structure of two fathers is also a possibility where both fathers would share parental roles to make the child grow developmentally in the best possible way (Kruk 162). What is being said here is that a two parent single household family structure is the best for a child to grow developmentally stable with life socially and mentally.

A major objection to the fact that children need a two parent single household to grow is if the parents marriage is so hostile that it would be healthier for everyone in the situation to have the family split (Amato, Kane, and James 511). If the absolute last resort to make the family happy is to split up then it needs to be done so that the children are not being hurt emotionally at home. Even though the children will still obtain some of the effects above they are more likely to deal with them in an easier fashion if they become knowledgeable about the situation and understand it is not their fault.

This could be called a good divorce by some experts, which can also be defined as one where the child is kept in close contact with each parent and the parents seem to have a cooperative view on parenting (Amato, Kane, and James 514). Letting the child maintain close relationships with both parents will make the transition easier. Also showing the children that the parents are cooperating will lessen the effects but not completely eliminate them from the situation (Amato, Kane, and James 514).

The divorce problem does not look like it will end any time soon and we need to be on the look out for ways to help children in these situations so they don’t end up putting their children through the same experience. Many people are effected by divorce in a family but children are the one’s who look up to their mom’s and dad’s as role models. If children grow up knowing that it is ok to live separated, their children will also see this situation as normal family lifestyle and the trend will continue to grow and our whole world will eventually become one big stepfamily that fights all the time. A two parent single household nuclear family is needed to make “the world go round.”

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